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Dreams Change

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Soul nurturer, writer, speaker, workshop leader, and author.

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Dreams Change

by Annie Burnside

What has been brought to light again and again within me over the past year and a half of substitute teaching is to be unafraid to do something "small" with my life. I have learned that it's okay to move in a direction that may seem small to yourself, others, society. We don't have to buy into the external or internal messages that tell us we need to be bigger, better and more in everything we do.

I used to write articles and blogs, appear as a guest on radio shows, make presentations, lead workshops, and wrote two books, one award-winning, about the soul-to-soul perspective, all presented in a "bigger" way.

But things change. Dreams change. We change. Sometimes we realize that being "big" was never really the true desire of our soul, but perhaps just the dream of an outer layer of ourselves. I realized that this was no longer what my soul really desired at all. Maybe it never was. Now instead of writing and speaking with a focus on growing a larger audience, I actually yearn to live by crossing paths with others who have nothing to do with being part of an audience.

Now I work as a substitute teacher for grades pre-k through eighth grade in the Evanston Public Schools and the Chicago Public Schools in Illinois. I thoroughly enjoy the spontaneity of heading to different schools and being with different-aged students. I appreciate the experience even beyond the connection with children and teachers and custodians from all backgrounds. Pulling up to old schools tucked away in city neighborhoods on tree-lined streets is pleasurable to me. Many of these old schools have huge windows, hardwood floors and sunlight pouring in. While substitute teaching is challenging at times due to behavior management issues that sometimes occur, overall I have been surprised at how much I am learning both about myself and others. Throughout the day, I discover opportunities for soul-to-soul connections with other people who would not ordinarily cross my path.

My new work as a substitute teacher may seem less important or prestigious to some people than what I previously did, but it satisfies me. I originally went into it thinking that I would move back into full-time teaching, which is where I began my career many years ago in the fourth grade classroom before having my own children. However, the simplicity and daily choice of the substitute position is freeing for me on many levels.

We are unique in our desires, financial needs, stages of growth. Now I find that it is more than okay, more than enough, to enjoy a perceived small arena. The big arena that so many of us think we want may be overrated. I now understand that the concept of a small arena is a relative one. And perhaps the small arena can prove to be quite big in the most important ways. Finally, I see that fear of the big arena in that we may "hide our light under a bushel" for interior reasons is quite different from choosing a small arena because we truly desire a simpler existence.

It is empowering for substitute teachers, custodians, children, parents – all of us – to know that doing big or doing small, each of us is worthy. Remembering this keeps me grounded and helps me find the inspiration each day to place more focus on *being* big rather than doing big by offering big warmth, presence and love in my own "Annie" way to all whom I encounter. And when a Kindergartener calls me "Mrs. Sideburn" instead of Mrs. Burnside, it makes me smile.

Annie Burnside, M.Ed., is a former fourth grade teacher who became a stay-at-home mom for several years before creating her own career as a soul nurturer, writer, speaker and workshop leader. She is the author of two books, *Soul to Soul Parenting* and *From Role to Soul*. She is currently a substitute teacher and runs a monthly Soul Circle for women in the Chicago-area.



Photo by Cece McCarthy.